



"Hour of the Wolf": The Case of Ingmar B.

Lynda Buntzen; Carla Craig

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pressed people of England. Comrade was stuck on by Cauter as an ironic reference to the Soviet Union.

Did you find that with Production Board help you were able to complete the film pretty much as you wanted to?

Exactly. Andrew says if we had had commercial backing there would have been differences but I think the differences would have been the wrong ones. You know I was in the States working with Merian C. Cooper and he kept saying to me, "Kevin, when you make your picture make sure it moves." So I had this idea that I was going to make a film that really moved along but then we found that it had to be a lot slower than I'd envisaged.

Can I ask you your opinion of the current injection of government funds into the British film industry?

I think it is perfectly criminal that the film industry should expect funds in preference over hospitals, schools, and places that desperately need it for sheer survival. To waste it all over again as they have always done. But movies, meaning the old-fashioned popular art form, are dead and what has replaced them is the millenium that everyone strove for in the film society movement in the thirties—that there would be some miracle whereby everyone would have an Odeon in their front room and be obliged to watch films they would never see ordinarily. And they do—magnificent, brave, courageous films, among all the rubbish. So what are we complaining about? Television is the current popular art. But as someone in love with the cinema, I sneakily regret this.

LYNDA BUNTZEN with CARLA CRAIG

Hour of the Wolf: The Case of Ingmar B.

The epigraph to Vernon Young's study of Ingmar Bergman, *Cinema Borealis*, is drawn from W. H. Auden's *New Year Letter*:

Definition of a classical artist:

*One whose dementia is simply the occasion
of release for his talent.*

Definition of a romantic artist:

*One whose dementia becomes his subject
matter.¹*

Young does not instruct his reader directly on the applicability of Auden's distinction. But it is soon evident from the frequently mocking tone that Young regards (and indicts) Bergman as a "romantic" whose intellectual pretensions barely disguise his neurotic anxieties. From the outset, it is also clear that Young is a formal critic. He evaluates Bergman's films on the basis of their coherence, their self-sufficiency as objects for

aesthetic contemplation, and on how succinctly they represent what they are "really about." This should be, Young says, "normally reducible to a gnomic text, a general statement that satisfies our need to explain the moral power which the work of art exercises over us."² It follows that it should *not* be reducible to a statement about the artist's personal suffering. Unfortunately, according to Young, Bergman's films too often display "an overweening preoccupation with his own pains and an overwhelming innocence of their real source."³

Bergman frequently needs a psychoanalyst rather than a critic to decipher his films, and once engrossed in the study of Bergman, Young becomes a Freudian, albeit a reluctant one. He would prefer, he says, to avoid such unsavory explorations into the life of his subject, but is compelled to do so by



Ingmar Bergman at the time HOUR OF THE WOLF was being made.

Bergman's "egotism." The prize which excuses these critical indiscretions is the group of films in the fifties and sixties in which Bergman transcends his disease and achieves the dignity of poetic metaphor.⁴ It is a terrible disappointment for Young when Bergman, having attained this artistic pinnacle, is then tempted once more by his private demons: *Hour of the Wolf*, released in 1968, is in Young's words "pure dementia," and he retreats in disgust from a thorough examination of the film. Young views Bergman almost like an alcoholic who cannot stay on the wagon:

... when he has managed at times, with a great intuitive leap, to objectify his own anxiety in a single form that authentically suggests the universal ailment, he immediately flees the implication, collapses in solipsism, or allows himself to be diverted by some peripheral nastiness or grudge. He is almost unique in the consistency with which he fails to shed his sicknesses by expressing them, generally conceded to be a blessing of the artistic process; almost it seems as if by expressing them he compounds them.⁵

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Young indulges the youthful Bergman with an astute psychoanalysis of the Oedipal conflict in his early films; but he is unwilling to examine an artistic failure in Bergman's maturity, on the grounds that Bergman should have grown up by now.

Yet *Hour of the Wolf*, precisely because it is a late film, provides the psychoanalytic critic with an opportunity to examine creative "blunders" which cannot be attributed to inexperience in film-making. In Bergman's late work, such blunders are almost solely due to a need for self-expression that dominates his critical and creative faculties. To the same degree that a film like *Hour of the Wolf* is formally unintelligible, it can be understood in psychoanalytic terms. In fact, the formal problems in *Hour of the Wolf* seem directly related to Bergman's need to disguise his "confessions" and reflect, as in a flawed mirror, anxieties that are not under complete artistic control. A close scrutiny of the film should therefore yield information about both Bergman and the relation between emotional disturbance and the creative process.

About *Hour of the Wolf*, Bergman is emphatic on three things: it is "horribly personal";⁶ he does not know what it is about; and it is unfinished—an "unsuccessful attempt" in "half-spoken sentences." Unabashed by one interviewer's comment, "I can't understand what's going on," Bergman replies, "Me, too."⁷ There also seems to be in Bergman's mind some relation between its incoherence and his own needs for self-analysis. Conceding its failure on formal grounds, he sees the problem as one of narrative perspective. When the filming was almost complete, Bergman unsuccessfully tried to shift the point-of-view from the mad artist, Johan Borg, to his wife, Alma:

The difficulty with the picture is that I couldn't make up my mind who it was about. Had I made it from her point of view it would have been very interesting. But no, I made it the wrong way. After it was finished, I tried to turn it over to her; we even reshot some scenes, but it was too late. To see a man who is already mad become crazier is boring. What would have been interesting would have been to see an absolutely sane woman go crazy because she loves the madman she married. She enters his world of unreality, and that infects her. Suddenly, she finds out that she is lost. I understood this only when the picture was finished.⁸

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What can also be said about this choice is that if Bergman had told the story from Alma's point of view, he would not have focused so clearly on himself. On two occasions—in a description of a childhood punishment and a little speech on the uselessness of art in the modern world—Johan Borg recites, almost *verbatim*, what Bergman has told the public about his own life and his feelings about being an artist. These two incidents, as we shall see, are also keys to understanding Bergman's neurosis and how it is related to his ambitions as an artist. For Johan Borg is Ingmar Bergman, and his madness an exaggerated projection of the artist's worst fears. It was only after the shooting of the film and the expression of the anxieties Johan Borg suffers that Bergman could achieve critical detachment and see a realizable form in the chaos he had created.

As the story is told, the flaws are numerous. It is impossible to distinguish between incidents and characters that are real and those which belong to Borg's hallucinatory world. Before the credits, we read a statement attesting to the truth of the story, and we are then confronted with Alma as narrator. This pre-credit statement permits Bergman as director to assign responsibility for the confusion over what is real and what is delusory to Alma. But since she, in turn, is drawn into Johan's world of demons, she ultimately cannot help the baffled spectator, who must ask questions about the reality of events, despite the unavailability of answers.

The spectator receives no stylistic clues from Bergman, who compounds the difficulties of Alma's narration with an erratic fluctuation between narrative realism and Gothic horror. The most dramatic instance of the alternation in styles occurs in the characterization. On the one hand, the portrayal of Alma is subtle, naturalistic, and totally believable. She is an "earth mother": an unadorned beauty who is either lovingly maternal or submissive in her gestures toward Johan; awkwardly pregnant; and almost always shown performing homely tasks. Her "symbols" are the bowl of fruit she has before her at the beginning of the film and the blossoming tree that she greets with rapture when she and Johan arrive on the island. She is indeed, as she tells Johan much later in the film, a "whole person," and we believe in her presence as we do in the



Opening footage added in attempt to "turn over" the film's point of view to Alma

rough hut, the barren landscape, the ocean—all filmed by a stable and unobtrusive camera that records simply but with eloquence.

The scenes with the demons, on the other hand, are filled with cinematic tricks: overexposed film, odd-angle shots, a circular tracking around a dinner party with the demons that is calculated to cause vertigo. One demon has bird wings; another climbs walls and ceilings; and all the demons are dead-white and vampirish. As Robin Wood points out, Bergman has borrowed liberally from many well-known horror films for his garish effects: *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Frankenstein*, *The Bride of Frankenstein*, and *Dracula*.⁹ The portrayal of the demons is almost "camp," and set against Alma's human vitality, they frequently provoke laughter, unintended I believe by Bergman. A good instance of this jarring contrast between realism and Gothic horror occurs when an old crone visits Alma. Alma is fetching water from an outdoor pump when she senses an alien presence and turns around to discover an old woman in nineteenth-century dress—



Johan's
"demons"

ruffles, parasol, and a large, florid hat. Among other cryptic messages, some of them lost to the wind, she tells Alma that she is over 200 years old. The crone's absurd costume and bizarrely sudden appearance are confusing next to Alma's faded smock and stolid reality. The contrast is so dumbfounding that it leads to laughter rather than terror. The old woman's manner is off-hand, absentminded, as if she has wandered on to the wrong film set. Her only function seems to be the "temptation" of Alma, who spies on Johan by reading his diary at the old woman's urging.

The worst blunder in the film, however, is Johan's disappearance at the end. As Alma watches him in terror, Johan's demons brutally attack him. Just where he disappears to, or whether he is dead, is never established. Even Alma does not seem concerned about the supernatural questions raised by his evaporation into thin air. Instead, she wonders whether everything that happened is somehow her fault: "Would I have been able to protect him if I loved him less? Or did I love him enough? Didn't my jealousy bring them [i.e., the demons]? I thought I was close to him. Sometimes I felt he thought so too. If only I could have been with him

the whole time. . . ." These queries, from an innocent and loving bystander to Johan's progressive deterioration into complete insanity, are, in some ways, more puzzling than anything that has gone before. While it is true that Alma reads her husband's diary and frequently displays jealousy at the mention of Veronica Vogler—Johan's old mistress—it is hard to see Alma except as an undeserving victim of her husband's hallucinations. After Johan tries to kill her, she feigns death and does not accompany her husband on his final visit to the demons' castle; and this, too, does not seem a blameworthy desertion, but a healthy impulse toward self-preservation. It is important to note, however, that Bergman closes his film not with the question of what really happened to Johan—although that is a natural response—but instead with the question of who is responsible, *who is to blame* for Johan's illness. It is this question that Bergman is absorbed with throughout the film, although it is well-disguised by the pretense of the macabre. Despite all the trappings of the horror film, *Hour of the Wolf* is a dramatized case-history of neurosis—Bergman's own.

Previous to *Hour of the Wolf*, Bergman affixed

blame on the father, projected as a silent, indifferent, and predatory spider-God. His presence, or perhaps absence would be more accurate, is felt in the trilogy: *Through a Glass Darkly*, *Winter Light*, and *The Silence*. In *Cinema Borealis*, Vernon Young traces the father-God's silence, which agonizes the doubting Thomas of *Winter Light*, back to Bergman's father. Bergman's father apparently refused to speak to his son as a mild (*sic*) punishment for minor infractions.¹⁰ But in *Hour of the Wolf*, it is the more severe punishment little Ingmar received for serious offenses that is recalled in a major episode. On the night of Johan's final vigil in the "hour of the wolf," he tells Alma that when he was a child, he was punished by being locked into a dark wardrobe and told that there was a little man inside who would bite off his toes. In mounting hysteria, he climbed the stacks of boxes to flee the little man. He then screamed his need for forgiveness. The mother told the father that Johan was ready to be released, and the father then asked him how severely he should be caned with the rod. "As hard as possible," Johan replied and dutifully piled pillows on the sofa, dropped his trousers, and stooped over for his whipping. The father whipped him "hard but not unbearably," and when the ordeal was over, little Johan asked his mother if she would forgive him. She tearfully extended her hand, and little Johan kissed it submissively.

In interviews, Bergman recounts this incident in illustration of a rigid upbringing as a Lutheran minister's son: "This happened forty or forty-two years ago, and not just once. It was a ritual. It's amazing I came out of it with my life."¹¹ His father appears sadistic, terrorizing his son psychologically with the stifling darkness and the fictitious "little man," and then breaking his will with corporal punishment. A psychoanalytic critic also has rich material here for interpretation. In Freudian terms, the little man in the wardrobe threatens castration, and the son's masochistic subjection to the caning, expressed in his desire for the most severe punishment, is a recognition of the sexual dominance of the father. There is also a strong suggestion of homosexual rape in the caning, which follows the symbolic emasculation of the little boy. This latter interpretation, as we shall see, is borne out by other episodes in the film that recapitulate the

childhood punishment in other forms and other characters.

The first answer to "Who is to blame for Bergman's dementia?" is now easy: his father. But this is so obvious, we may well ask why Bergman insists that he "can't understand what's going on," and, to echo Vernon Young's complaint, why does Bergman need yet another film after the trilogy to achieve revenge against his father? The answer is that *Hour of the Wolf* is not only the fulfillment of a grudge against the father. Although it is the father who administers punishment, it is the mother who hands over the little boy to his father, and it is her forgiveness that is finally sought. But it may not be her forgiveness, but her tears that the little boy wished to provoke—a punishment for betraying him to the cruelty of the father. The mother is to blame for initiating the ordeal.

From this perspective, we can see that the whole film is designed in a perverse way to punish Alma, the loving maternal figure. Johan's hallucinatory world is a nightmare version of the dark wardrobe and the castrating little man he was subjected to as a child. And since the mother left him to experience these terrors unprotected and alone, she must now be forced into the world and experience its terrors. Alma's punishment will be a similar desertion and eternal remorse and doubt over her responsibility for Johan's illness. The film cannot be "told" from her point-of-view because it is Johan, Bergman's double, who is the victim, and Alma, the mother's double, who is the Judas and secret villain of the piece, despite all of Bergman's feeble attempts to disguise from himself and his audience this grudge.

What precisely is the character of Johan's illness? As Alma describes his symptoms, as he shows her the pictures that he has drawn of his hallucinations, and as we witness the hallucinations that he has recorded in his diary, it seems increasingly likely that he is paranoid. Freud divides the repression which is at the root of paranoia into three phases. The first is fixation, in which "an instinct or instinctual component fails to accompany the rest along the anticipated normal path of development, and, in consequence of this inhibition in its development, is left behind at a more infantile stage." In the second phase, "physical derivatives of the

original lagging instincts" or other physical trends which have become aversively associated with these instincts are expelled from consciousness. In the case of paranoia, one of these physical trends is a homosexual impulse.¹² In the third phase of repression, internal perceptions are projected as external perceptions, and we have full delusion-formation and hallucination.¹³

Let us return for a moment to the childhood punishment that initiated Johan's illness. One of the oddities in his narration to Alma is that Johan does not reveal his offense. What precisely was the nature of Johan's "crime"? And why does Johan either consciously censor or forget what he did to provoke this harsh punishment? If Freudian explanations are valid, a good hypothesis would be that his mother caught him in a forbidden act of masturbation, probably while engaging in incestuous fantasies. This would explain, in part, the castrating little man the father creates, and little Johan's desire for the most severe punishment. His "crime" forces him to submit eagerly to his father, in the hope of expiating the guilt for his incestuous desires. Outwardly he renounces any rivalry with his father for the mother's affection, but inwardly he feels a murderous desire to destroy his rival, and this only increases his sense of guilt. His father beat him "hard but not unbearably." Little Johan's punishment would, however, have to be unbearable in order to (1) fulfill his overwhelming need for expiation, and (2) discourage more incestuous fantasies. There would have to be an actual castration. The attempt at repentance therefore fails, and Johan retains an unconscious sense of guilt. His over-submissiveness toward both parents only masks his conflicting impulses—a continuing desire to possess the mother and a strong fear and hatred of the father. The result is a paralysis of the libido and impotence.

Although every male's sexual development retains the imprint of his "infantile feelings of tenderness for the mother," Freud says that in most cases, "the detachment of the libido is accomplished comparatively swiftly," after which there remain "only a few traces unmistakably betraying" this infantile phase.¹⁴ The male moves on to resolve his Oedipal complex by identifying with his father and choosing love-objects who are like his mother but for whom he does not have to risk castration by

competing with his father. But apparently this alternative is closed to Johan; his infantile attraction toward the mother has become fixated. Thus he cannot escape from this trap of fearful attraction toward the mother and terror of the father's penis because "the libido has dwelt so long in its attachment to the mother . . . that the maternal characteristics remain stamped on the love-objects chosen later—they all become easily recognizable mother-surrogates."¹⁵ Most males with this type of fixation find an outlet for their Oedipal feelings of rivalry and jealousy by fantasizing that they or some idealized image of themselves grown up and "brought to equality with the father" win the mother away from the father.¹⁶ These are "phantasies, in which the mother is represented in sexual situations of the most manifold kind, and in which also the accompanying excitement leads particularly readily to culmination in an onanistic act."¹⁷ Young Johan's mother, however, has made such a release impossible. If our hypothesis is correct, she has caught him in the midst of precisely such a fantasy and onanistic act, and therefore such fantasies, which ought to relieve anxiety over the Oedipal rivalry with the father, are charged with castration anxiety.

When such a fixation takes its normal course, jealousy of the love-object or mother-surrogate heightens sexual excitement because it again provides an outlet for the boy's unresolved feelings of Oedipal rivalry and is an acting-out of exciting incestuous fantasies. The love-triangle recapitulates the original father-mother-son situation. Such jealousy is exciting to Johan, too; he mentions in his diary that his mistress Veronica Vogler's infidelity during their love affair increased his passion. Two other instances of the perverse way in which jealousy increases sexual passion in *Hour of the Wolf* verify the mechanism in Johan. The Baroness Von Merckens, Corinne, desires her lovers to leave marks on her from sexual intercourse in order to arouse her husband, and the Baron, while literally "climbing the walls" in anger over Johan's rendezvous with Veronica Vogler, who is now his mistress, only promises to watch the coupling as a voyeur. For Johan, however, jealousy cannot provide an outlet for his anxiety, because it is associated in his mind with a threatening father watching him, and the result once again is impotence.

Hence, Johan is caught in a trap. Blocked by his fixation from resolving his Oedipal complex normally, denied by his cruel superego the alternative outlets for Oedipal tensions usually sought by such fixated cases, and burdened with an intense fear of the castration implicit in homosexual submission to the father, he can escape agonizing guilt and fear of castration only by total withdrawal and hallucinations in which he becomes the innocent victim rather than the guilty offender; and indeed, Johan is victimized by a whole cast of demons—all sexual predators.

During the first night-vigil, Johan shows Alma pictures he has drawn of his demons. They are a motley group: Heerbrand, the homosexual; an old woman who threatens to remove her face with her hat; the birdman ("I don't know whether it's a real beak or a mask. He's related to Papageno in *The Magic Flute*"): a schoolteacher with a long pointer in his trousers; and chattering women "as hard as nails." Although, as Robin Wood points out, "it is vain to try to attach detailed significance to individuals,"¹⁸ collectively the characteristics of the demons represent an interconnected set of fears and anxieties. The schoolteacher never appears in the film, but his description interprets the feelings of little Johan toward his father in the childhood ordeal. The father's cane is here a long pointer in the schoolmaster's trousers, and by this displacement becomes an erect and punishing penis. This demon expresses Johan's fear of emasculation and homosexual rape. The birdman is also a father-figure. The cane is even further displaced as a punishing beak that will, at the end of the film, peck out Johan's eyes. With his relationship to Papageno, we might expect the birdman to be a "child of nature" and joyful figure of animal sexuality. Instead, he is an aging, unctuous director of Johan's failed sexual performance before the other demons.

Heerbrand seems to be Johan's double. He is regarded by Johan as the most harmless of the demons in his homosexual overtures. Physically, Heerbrand resembles Bergman (a bland face, beret) and he claims to be a reader of men's souls—not a bad statement of Bergman's purpose as a film director.¹⁹ In a flashback, we see Heerbrand following Johan, taunting him about his art, his age, his nervousness. Johan bloodies his nose

in an attempt to silence the expression of anxieties that are obviously his own. As the most overt representation of Johan's feelings of impotence as an artist and a man, Heerbrand is manageable—until the end of the film, when he both provides Johan with a gun to kill Alma and is the first to strike Johan in the final scene.

The old woman is a figure of death. On the last night of the story, she unnerves Johan by removing her face to reveal a skull. The Freudian interpretation of the fear of death is that it is a displacement for the fear of castration. While the old woman removes her face, Johan imitates her actions by rubbing his open hand down his face. Immediately after, he is made-up as a woman by the birdman and proves to be impotent with Veronica Vogler. The episode with the old woman can therefore be seen as a symbolic castration leading to Johan's humiliation.

Aside from the old woman, the female demons are not distinguished except as "chattering"—like birds—and "hard as nails," a phrase that prepares us for the gashes they inflict on Johan with their fingernails. As they are shown later, they contrast sharply with the natural beauty of Alma in their harsh make-up, dyed or bleached hair, and their sexual voracity. If Alma is the virginal Mother Mary figure, then they are representations of the mother as a sexually available whore. With her white hair and dress, Veronica Vogler seems to be an open and grotesque imitation of Marilyn Monroe or Jean Harlow. She is an aging "blonde bombshell." Johan's hunger for her and his jealousy of her other men is an obsession that masks his fear of sexual inadequacy. He must prove himself with the most sexually desirable female.

All of the demons are, then, sexually threatening, and delusory projections of Johan's guilt and fear. The chief delusion is parental seduction. Immediately after Johan recalls the childhood incident for Alma, we are shown two nightmare versions of the same series of events, and in each Johan receives a sexual invitation. Johan tells Alma that on the day he reported a snake-bite to her, he lied. Something else happened, and he must now confess it only to her. As he begins the narration, we cut to an overexposed sequence of Johan fishing, accompanied by electronic music as the only sound. A boy in swimming trunks approaches from behind



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Johan, pauses, and then walks over to Johan's painting canvases and his catch of three fishes. He examines both critically and glances at Johan, who is visibly ruffled, but trying to ignore the boy. The boy then walks over to Johan's boots and looks inside, then to Johan, who is extremely upset. The boy walks back toward Johan and climbs up on the rocks behind him. Only the pounding electronic music tells us that the boy is a menace to Johan. He can no longer continue fishing while being watched and furls the rod nervously, the music once again imitating an emotionally charged situation. As Johan puts down his pole, the boy lies down on a rock in a beckoning pose. Johan is enraged, leans over the boy, and screams at him while the music drowns out his words. They struggle and the boy mounts him from behind, clinging to his neck, choking him. Johan finally wrenches free, picks up the limp boy and sets him on a rock. Like a snake, the boy's head darts at Johan's foot and bites him. Johan picks up a rock and in throbbing jump-cuts in and out on his face, we watch Johan beating the boy. Finally, Johan draws back, lifts the boy and drops him into the sea. The camera turns to the water where we see the head of the boy rising, his hair forming an aureole of waving tentacles, and then sinking once again. We watch a worried, disgusted Johan pick up his pole, his canvases, and walk away.

In Robin Wood's words, "the most obvious interpretation of the scene is that it symbolises an attempt to suppress homosexual tendencies. . . . The fishing rod, in the position in which it is filmed, carries very obvious phallic overtones, and Johan's desperate and clumsy attempts to reel in are surely

an hysterical effort to deny sexual response." Wood also notes the boy's contemptuous examination of the paintings and the three fishes and interprets these actions as mockery of Johan's artistic and sexual abilities ("the three fishes are Bergman's favorite Freudian phallic symbol—see *Prison* and *Waiting Women*")²⁰ We need not contradict this interpretation, but we must take a slightly different direction—away from the idea implicit in Wood's explanation that this boy is a real presence. He can be better understood as the "little man" of Johan's childhood ordeal. How else can we explain his examination of Johan's boot? Formally, this action makes little sense. As a dream representation in a nightmare, however, it is an acting-out of Johan's fear that the little man will bite off his toes. This is also the only clear explanation for Johan's mounting hysteria as the boy watches him. Johan is once again caught in a forbidden act (the fishing as a representation of masturbation) and fears punishment. For Freud, nightmares, like ordinary dreams, were wish-fulfillments, but in a peculiar way. In nightmares, the dreamer returns to a traumatic incident in his life in order to master the fearful emotions it aroused but which were not mastered at the time.²¹ Here there is an attempt at mastery, too. The little Johan who bent over the cushions in servile submission to his father's rod is now a grown man who will not passively accept punishment. He resists both the little man's seduction and mounting. He is "castrated" anyway—impotent to prevent the little man's bite. However, he takes revenge by beating the little man "unbearably"—until he is dead. Like most dream representations, the boy is "overdetermined": he is most clearly the little man in the wardrobe; but he is also Johan's father reduced to manageable size; and yes, little Johan himself being beaten.²² Johan is both releasing murderous impulses against his father and reliving the beating he was given as a child. The whole sequence is a self-punishing nightmare born from the fear and hatred of the father and then the ensuing guilt his hatred caused.

The final image of the boy's head, bobbing in the water, reappears later, after Johan is sexually humiliated. It has, then, a special significance, but is perhaps, the most displaced metaphor in this nightmare. It faintly resembles a Medusa

head, with its waving, snake-like hair. If this is a reasonable inference, then perhaps Freud's explanation for the terror of the Medusa explains Johan's experience:

To decapitate = to castrate. The terror of Medusa is thus a terror of castration that is linked to the sight of something. Numerous analyses have made us familiar with the occasion for this: it occurs when a boy, who has hitherto been unwilling to believe the threat of castration, catches sight of the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair, and essentially those of his mother.

The hair upon Medusa's head is frequently represented in works of art in the form of snakes and these once again are derived from the castration complex. It is a remarkable fact that, however frightening they may be in themselves they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of horror. This is a confirmation of the technical rule according to which a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration.

The sight of Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror, turns him to stone. Observe that we have here once again the same origin from the castration complex and the same transformation of affect! For becoming stiff means erection. Thus in the original situation it offers consolation to the spectator: He is still in the possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact.²³

This description fits Johan's predicament rather well: he is afraid of women as sexual devourers; he fears castration by the father; and he has small consolation in the fact that he has been able to placate the father by his submissiveness and avoided actual castration. He is still in possession of a penis, but because he has been made passive, feminized, he is impotent to use it. He is sexually paralyzed.

We see this impotence portrayed in yet a third rendition of the punishment. In this episode, it is the mother who emerges as the seducer and betrayer of little Johan. After the flashback to the "snake-bite confession," we return to Alma and Johan in their vigil. There is a knock on the door and Heerbrand enters. He places a gun on the table, for the purpose, he says, of "protecting yourself from small game on the island." He invites Johan to a party where Veronica Vogler will be present and then leaves. At first Alma is terror-stricken. She pleads with Johan to put the

gun away, but he refuses. She then grows angry and bids him to tell her about Veronica Vogler. She is obviously jealous and thrusts his diary on the table, telling Johan that the diary contradicts the perfunctory account he has given her of the affair. She begins reading. It is a tale of obsessive love and jealousy on Johan's part. When Johan tries to tear the diary, Alma reverts to pleading. She tells him he once liked the fact that God made her in one piece and that it was important such people existed. She liked that, "but," she says, "I was wrong. I understand nothing. I am only afraid. I don't want to be killed, or talk to your demons, or watch you running after Veronica Vogler." Alma, who has been throughout a protective maternal presence for Johan, is confused, somewhat spiteful, and fearful. The combination of feelings adds up to a desertion of Johan in his greatest need. It is obvious she will no longer provide a barrier to the demons' possession of Johan and she gives him up to their control. Very coldly, Johan tells her to rise and go to the door and then he deliberately shoots Alma, the "good mother" who has betrayed him.

The implicit accusation here is that Alma's possessiveness contributes passively to Johan's destruction, that because she is jealous of Veronica Vogler, she is unable to save him from castration by the father. Immediately following this scene with Alma, Johan is seduced by all the demons into a rendezvous with Veronica Vogler. Both Von Merkens, Veronica's new paramour, and the birdman Lindhorst are eager to lead Johan to his old mistress. If we see these two men as parental figures, they represent two accusations Johan makes against the father. Von Merkens, in his jealousy and his promise to watch every detail of the meeting with Veronica, enjoys the sexual rivalry with his son. It makes the "mother" more attractive sexually and satisfies his need to prove his own potency by humiliating a sexually inferior rival. As a father-figure, the birdman feminizes his son. He dresses Johan in a silk dressing gown, applies lipstick, rouge, eyeliner, and perfume in preparation for the meeting. The women demons as maternal figures are in league with the father. The old whore who greets Johan forces him to kiss her foot (a displaced recapitulation of the childhood punishment, when Johan kissed his mother's



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hand) before she will direct him to Veronica; and Corinne, listening to a harpsichordist named Kreisler, mockingly tells Johan that Kreisler is a “master of his instrument,” while it is evident from Johan’s anxious, worried face that he is not.

Johan finally reaches a crypt-like room where Veronica Vogler lies on a catafalque as if dead, waiting for him. He pulls back the sheet and calls her name. As he strokes her body, she comes to life with a raucous laugh. They embrace and kiss passionately, but Veronica’s derisive laughter is soon echoed by the other demons standing in the doorway, delighted and malicious voyeurs. Veronica smears the make-up on Johan’s face until he looks like a clown, and then Johan steps forward to confront his demons: “The end has been reached and I am glad. The glass is shattered, but what do the splinters reflect?” The camera tracks in to Johan, his words drowned out by the sound of a foghorn, and we dissolve to a shot of the little boy’s head in the water, rising to the surface with the hair fanning out. Throughout, Veronica Vogler kneels on the catafalque in back of Johan, triumphantly pointing to her left breast, as if to some mark Johan has left on her. Johan has been seduced into an illicit sexual act, brought into the position of rival to Baron Von Merkens, and finally made impotent to carry it out. The “mark” he leaves will only arouse his rival to greater passion and enjoyment. The demons are projections of fearful parental figures who manipulate little Johan into a sexual triangle that will increase their own pleasure. However persistent Johan may be in suppressing his fears, they return to haunt him as the Medusa head of the little boy rises

once again to the surface of the water. He has been feminized once again.

Like the paranoid who withdraws totally from a threatening world, Johan finally “disappears.” Alma, who has only been wounded by Johan, pursues him into a swamp after he returns from the castle. We see her cradling her exhausted husband, once again trying to shield him from his own hallucinations. There is a dissolve to Alma awaking, Johan no longer in her arms. Instead, Von Merkens stands before her, telling her to call for Johan who is walking away into the swamp. First Heerbrand, then the old whore, Corinne, and the birdman dart at him, pecking and jabbing like birds of prey. The birdman, in fact, is metamorphosed into a bird. Johan is passive, mutely accepting each blow. Johan is castrated here—finally achieving the unbearable punishment he sought as a child. He is at last devoured and vanishes, leaving Alma alone and confused.

One of the peculiarities of the film is that Alma and Veronica Vogler are never shown together. Veronica appears only when Alma deserts him. This suggests that they represent a split-image of the mother: Alma is the good mother—protective, loving, and sexually unavailable—while Veronica is a seducer, the mother of Johan’s incestuous fantasies. The only characteristic of the seductive mother that has been transposed to Alma is possessiveness and jealousy. This leads to her desertion of him on the final night in the castle and is a crime warranting the punishment she receives by Johan. She sees first the consequences of her betrayal in Johan’s devouring and is then left pregnant and stranded on a barren island. If we return to the question she poses at the end of the film, “Would I have been able to protect him if I loved him less? Or did I love him enough?”, the answer is yes to both. Johan’s mother did not love him enough to protect him from the father, and too much, since her possessiveness led to a prolonged dependence that made a woman out of him.

Now we can also see why *Hour of the Wolf* is a puzzle to Bergman and, formally, an incoherent work of art. If Johan is Bergman’s double, then this film is both a vivid dramatization of a sense of sexual inadequacy and cruel revenge on the mother for causing it. She encouraged and enjoyed little

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Ingmar's hopeless rivalry with his father. At every point where an audience might expect an answer to "What is wrong with Johan Borg?", it receives instead a nightmare allegory demanding extensive interpretation. The audience is likely to be deceived by the horror-film effects because they obfuscate the fact that what we are witnessing is hallucinatory. The paranoid delusions are thrust on the audience as "real" events. As such, they are meant to frighten the audience away from the detached—indeed, clinical—speculations necessary to understand this case history posing as thriller. Once clinical detachment is achieved, *Hour of the Wolf* also becomes tedious. Each of the major episodes is merely a retelling of the same childhood ordeal. As Bergman himself recognized, it is boring to watch an insane man going more crazy, but he could not, it seems, resist his own needs to portray himself as a victim.

Since the primary interest of the film is its creator, the question must be raised whether we learn anything of significance about Bergman as an artist from this film. There is one incident in the film that we have not discussed that specifically illuminates the relationship between his feelings toward being an artist and his sexual anxieties. It occurs after the demons' dinner party with Johan and Alma. The birdman Lindhorst entertains the group with a scene from *The Magic Flute*. The "puppet" Tamino is plaintively calling for his beloved Pamina, and the chorus answers, "Soon, soon youth, or never." Throughout the performance, the birdman smiles malevolently at Johan, implying that it has some special significance for the artist. When the performance is over he tells Johan that Mozart created *The Magic Flute* for money, but "even though it is a naive, commissioned work," it is also the "highest manifestation of art." Johan, asked for his opinion, responds nervously. He tells them he is a fraud—an artist only by inner compulsion over which he himself has no control. Once he was a megalomaniac, but now this megalomania is controlled by his knowledge of how indifferent the world is to art. Everyone applauds Johan's little speech, but there is a slight overtone of mocking disbelief for Johan's "apology."

Johan's self-denigration is placating in a rather odd way, given the context of the film as a whole. We might interpret the birdman, who appears as



a manipulative puppeteer, to be saying, "It is all right to prostitute yourself. Look at Mozart, the 'great example,' producing the highest art under commission to a wealthy, powerful man." Johan, in turn, deflects this invitation to prostitute himself by insisting that the torment which forces him to create cannot be bought, that he is free from all but personal needs for creating. Johan assures everyone that he is no longer a megalomaniac. This is placatory, since it assures the powerful, wealthy patron—a father-figure—that Johan is not a rival and therefore not worth humiliating.

Earlier, at the dinner table, Baron Von Merkens, who claims to be a patron of the arts, has told everyone about a little joke he pulled on another artist. He hung the artist's painting upside down and invited the artist and his guests to enjoy his wit. Everyone at the table laughs uproariously and viciously while Johan squirms in discomfort, the obvious butt of the joke. It is this sort of humiliation that Johan perhaps wishes to avoid by his humble little speech which is, in fact, a protective ruse. For despite Johan's self-denigration, his ostensible relinquishing of power, he is demonstrating his sexual potency with his art and proving himself a worthy sexual rival to the father. The Baroness Von Merkens certainly believes in the "potency" of Johan's art. She keeps his portrait of Veronica Vogler above her bed to arouse her and tells Alma that she has "bought a slice" of Johan while she clings seductively to the artist.

It should be noted that Bergman himself persistently denigrates his art. He is fond of saying that he does not create films *sub specie aeternitatis*, but for immediate public consumption. They are to be used and thrown away.²⁴ Johan's speech

on inner compulsion and megalomania is likewise a description Bergman has used for his own creative powers. Although Bergman is infatuated with this humble pose of servant to the public, he is one of a handful of directors who exercises and demands absolute control over his film-making; and his films are not often accessible to a popular audience. He also has an ambivalent relationship with critics. On the one hand, he is one of the most interviewed contemporary directors, and yet he is known for his violent tantrums and admits having made *The Rite*, a television film, specifically to slander the totalitarian power of critics over artists.²⁵

Bergman has also said many times that as a director, theater is his wife and film is his mistress. There is something illicit, forbidden about his activity as a film-maker. Film-making is related to his rivalry with the father for the mother's affection. It is no wonder then that Bergman should regard his need to make films as a torment, since it is bound so closely to his childhood fear of the father's discovery of his incestuous fantasies. What the *Hour of the Wolf* finally shows about Bergman's feelings toward being an artist is that (1) his humility is a diversionary tactic to prevent hostile criticism, (2) that the critics are, like father-figures, very threatening to Bergman's artistic "potency," and (3) that Bergman's art springs from a need to defy the father, but in a disguised way in order to prevent his wrath. We may be inclined to regard Bergman's following statement, delivered shortly before he physically attacked a hostile critic, as a "diversionary tactic":

- I have no need of power.
- I have no need to be influential.
- I have no need to be a participant in, or a shaper of, Swedish cultural life.
- I have no desire to justify myself before criticism.
- I have no need at all to strike out or to be aggressive. I hate that.²⁶

Collectively, these are his needs as a film-maker, but he must deny them or risk humiliation.

NOTES

1. *Cinema Borealis: Ingmar Bergman and the Swedish Ethos* (New York, 1971), p. iv.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
4. In his Introduction, Young warns the reader: "While I should prefer to engage my subject, Bergman as film-maker, at its finest hour, with fewer preliminaries and parentheses, I should not expect to clarify the subject adequately if I did so (pp. 6-7). The chief interest of the first half of *Cinema Borealis* is not the early films, but Bergman's personal development—his struggle with God and the Devil; his parental relationships and attitudes toward women and authority." Young wishes to destroy the prevailing notion that Bergman is an intellectual and re-create him as a "maker of expressive forms" which may stir his audience to thought, but are frequently maudlin and self-indulgent confessions (pp. 2-3).
5. *Ibid.*, p. 238.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 243. Quoted from a review by Per-Olof Enquist (*Chaplin 80*, Stockholm; March 1968).
7. Charles Thomas Samuels, *Encountering Directors* (New York, 1972), p. 206.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.
9. *Ingmar Bergman* (New York, 1969), pp. 160-61.
10. Vernon Young, p. 11.
11. Robin Wood, p. 24.
12. Sigmund Freud, "On the Mechanism of Paranoia (1911)," *General Psychological Theory*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York, 1963), p. 37.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
14. "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men (1910)," *On Creativity and the Unconscious* (New York, 1958), p. 166.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ingmar Bergman*, p. 166.
19. See the exchange between Charles Samuels and Ingmar Bergman on faces in *Encountering Directors*, p. 198.
20. *Ingmar Bergman*, p. 166.
21. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York, Toronto, London, 1959), p. 60.
22. A similar "overdetermined" analysis of a "beating" dream occurs in W. D. Snodgrass's essay on *Crime and Punishment*: "First of all, where is Raskolnikov in his dream? Is he the horse, the little boy, the father, or the brute Mikolka? The answer must be yes. All of the characters of the dream are the dreamer. The problem is not to decide who is who, but rather to understand the tenor of the dreamer's apprehension of the world, that is, of his mind." From "Crime and Punishment: The Tenor of Part One," *Hudson Review*, XIII (Summer 1960), p. 239.
23. "Medusa's Head," *The Complete Psychological Works of Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey et al. XVIII (London, 1955), p. 273.
24. *Encountering Directors*, pp. 182-183.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 183. Also see Vernon Young's account of Bergman's physical attack on a drama critic, *Cinema Borealis*, p. 254.
26. Quoted in *Cinema Borealis*, p. 259. More recently, Bergman has said, "I'm aggressive by nature. And I often find it hard to repress my aggressiveness." From Stig Bjorkman, Torsten Manns, and Jonas Sima, *Bergman on Bergman*, trans. Paul Britten Austin (New York, 1973), p. 227.